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10<sup>th</sup> Annual Law Day Essay Contest Features Theme, "Equality Before the Law"

## Nebraska Judicial News

June 2009

**Special Events Publication of the Nebraska Supreme Court** 



Justice Kenneth Stephan (center back) and Bar Foundation President Robert Berkshire (right back) with student essay winners' (front) Mark Lutkemeier and Hannah Opfer, (back) Kathryn Vampola, Ethan Steiner, Brooklyn Swantek, and Katie Nelson.

On a bright spring day, April 23, the Supreme Court and the Nebraska State Bar Foundation welcomed winners of the 10th Annual Law Day Essay Contest and their guests to a special recognition luncheon at the Governor's Residence in Lincoln. The six students, representing grades 7 through12, were honored for their writing skills, which addressed a question related to the Gettysburg Address:

How does the United States' legal system promote the ideals expressed

by President Abraham Lincoln in the first sentence of the Gettysburg Address given on November 19, 1863? "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Representing the Court, Justice Kenneth C. Stephan joined Bar Foundation President Robert H. Berkshire of Omaha in congratulating the student essayists

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Lancaster County Judge Jean Lovell and her Taiwanese Rotary exchange guest, Pei-Chun Chen, speak with fellow Rotarian, Judge Arlen Beam.

> The theme for the 50th anniversary of Law Day as set by the American **Bar Association:**

"A Legacy of Liberty: Celebrating Lincoln's Bicentennial"

also won the attend the National Student Leadership be held on a

essay concluded the following in tying our legal system with the ideals expressed by Lincoln in the **Gettysburg Address:** 

When we hear an attempt to demonize judges or justices with whom we disagree, we should remember this shared commitment to the rule of law. Our heritage should inspire us to fight attacks on an independent judiciary—whether they come from the left or the right. It is difficult, but important, to our judicial system that

the laws are applied the same to all citizens, regardless of income level, age, gender, race or religion.

Lutkemeier also won the Law Day Essay Contest as a 9th grader.

**Bar Foundation Vice President Kile** W. Johnson was master of ceremonies for the luncheon. Members of the Foundation's PEOPLE (Public Education and Outreach Promoting Law & Equity) Committee wrote the essay question and also judged the contest. **Committee members who volunteered** to assist in judging the essays were

Judge Lyle E. Strom, PEOPLE Committee Co-chair

with certificates of achievement and gifts from the Foundation. Ethan Steiner, Hartington Public School, was the 7th grade contest winner, and **Brooklyn Swantek, McCool Junction** Public School, was the winner from the 8th grade. Hannah Opfer, Blair High School, won the 9th grade award, and Katie Nelson from Omaha's Duchesne Academy won the 10th grade prize. Kathryn Vampola, daughter of Judge Kenneth Vampola, was the 11th grade winner. She represented Arlington High School.

and their teachers and presenting them

The senior winner, Mark Lutkemeier of Roseland's Silver Lake High School,





The 2009 Law Day luncheon, with Master of Ceremonies Kile Johnson (behind podium) was held at the Governor's Residence.

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Tom Keefe, PEOPLE Committee Co-chair Larry Karel Judge Tom Otepka Judge Richard Sievers Judge Donna Taylor Judge Frankie Moore Patrick Borchers Mike Kinney Terry Waite

In keeping with the **Law Day Essay Contest** theme, "Equality Before the Law," the Court and the Foundation sponsored an afternoon presentation by Boston actress Elena Dodd in the Supreme Court at the Capitol. Dodd portrayed Eleanor Roosevelt in a reenactment titled, "Meet **Eleanor Roosevelt:** Advocate for Universal Human Rights." Judge Sievers introduced the program before a standing-room-only audience, which included a Law & Literature class from Lincoln's Southeast High School.

An American History class from Johnson-Brock High School participated in the program via a Webbased distance learning connection. Johnson-

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Photos, top to bottom:

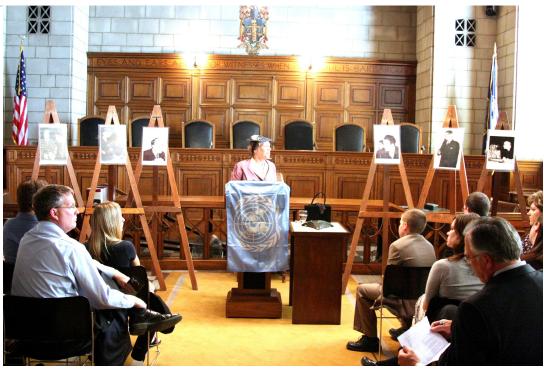
Judge Richard Sievers (behind podium), member of the Foundation's PEOPLE Committee, welcomes crowd to the Nebraska Supreme Court.

Lincoln Southeast High School student Maria Hopkins (left) and teacher Johnna Graff—2004 UNL Law School graduate—put finishing touches on introduction for "Eleanor Roosevelt."

Guest, Elena Dodd (right center), speaks with (I to r) Liz Willborn, Public Policy Center; Actress Pippa Lawson; and UNL College of Law Professor Craig Lawson (right).

Duveen Penner (left) of ESU 5 discusses 'learning cart' technology with Janet Bancroft and PEOPLE Committee Co-Chair Tom Keefe, while connecting to the Johnson-Brock classroom.





"Eleanor Roosevelt" gives presentation from the Nebraska Supreme Court Courtroom.

> Brock students, as well as students in the Lincoln audience, were able to ask questions of "Mrs. Roosevelt" and also of the actress as herself, once she removed the Eleanor Roosevelt signature hat and gloves.

Johnson-Brock teacher Lori Broady commented, "We loved doing it. We have participated in a few of these events before and our kids are very receptive to the process. Elena Dodd was wonderful! The kids certainly

gained a lot from the experience...as did

Dodd's performance was also underwritten by Thomson Reuters and the Nebraska Humanities Council.

More information about the Law Day activities may be found on the Bar Foundation's Web site at <a href="https://www.nebarfnd.org">www.nebarfnd.org</a>. Information about the history of Law Day may be found on the American Bar Association's Web site, <a href="https://www.lawday.org">www.lawday.org</a>.

Law-Related Education Consultant for the State Bar Foundation, Cindy Lilleoien (back right), introduces "Eleanor Roosevelt" to students prior to presentation.

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### Annual Law Day Celebration

The Law Day Essay Contest and Law Day Luncheon are jointly sponsored by the Nebraska State Bar Foundation, its Center for Law-Related Education, and the Nebraska Supreme Court. Each year, on or near May 1, a day is set aside to celebrate and enjoy our freedoms. It focuses on our heritage of liberty under law and how the rule of law makes our democracy possible.